

Some Things You Can Do to Be More Inclusive: Cultural Humility at Historic Sites



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On its website, the Ohio History Connection states that its mission is to “spark discovery of Ohio’s stories. Embrace the present, share the past and transform the future.” The History Connection isn’t alone in striving to carry out such a mission – Historical sites constantly face the challenge of maintaining relevance as audiences grow, change, and evolve. So what does this mission entail?

Sparking discovery entails making history relatable to the next generation. Sharing the past and embracing the present cannot be limited to telling the stories of a relatively small number of Ohioans. Transforming the future can only be achieved if history is inclusive and accessible to everyone. One group of Ohioans that is traditionally underserved is the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community. Just how big is this community?

According to the Williams Institute at UCLA, there are about 342,000 LGBTQ people in Ohio (3.8% of the population). That’s equivalent to the combined population of Toledo & Youngstown. Within that population are about 39,000 transgender and non-binary folks, which is a group large enough to fill both Nationwide Arena where the Columbus Blue Jackets play, and MAPFRE Stadium where Columbus Crew SC plays.

The LGBTQ community is also swiftly growing. Research from Gallup has shown the percentage of the U.S. population that asserts an LGBTQ identity grew from 3.5 % in 2012 to 4.1% in 2016. In raw numbers, 1.7 million additional people identified as LGBTQ in 2016 compared to 2012. Given the relative lack of comprehensive studies focused on the LGBTQ community, these numbers likely understate the size of this population. The same study shows that millennials (those born between 1980 and 1998) account for a huge amount of this overall growth. Millennials have now outpaced baby boomers as the biggest generational cohort in the United States, and it’s clear that this trend of growth for the LGBTQ community will continue into the coming decades. How can historical sites engage with this ever-growing group of Ohioans?

Obviously, integrating LGBTQ historical figures and events into existing exhibits and narratives would be a positive step. Additional positive steps would include making concerted efforts to recruit LGBTQ staff members, creating LGBTQ-specific exhibits and events, and partnering with local LGBTQ organizations on such endeavors. However, it’s crucial to not overlook the importance

of cultural humility and structural competency.

Cultural humility is, broadly stated, a commitment to other-regarding openness when engaging with members of other social groups (particularly marginalized groups). Structural competency constitutes efforts to create physical spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and safe for members of marginalized communities. What are some examples of these principles in practice?

Small changes to your sites can make a big difference. Include symbols of inclusiveness like the rainbow pride flag, and/or the trans pride flag. Consider changing the way you ask questions on forms to make them more inclusive for everyone regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI). For example, if you want information about the people that would be included in a family pass, use “parent 1 and parent 2” rather than “mother and father.” Change the signage on your single-occupancy restrooms to “all gender” or “gender neutral.” Prominently display non-discrimination policies that are inclusive of SOGI. Most importantly, train your personnel, including frontline staff, on LGBTQ cultural humility, with the goal of creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment on-site. Visitors who feel welcomed and affirmed are more likely to return, to participate in programming and collection efforts, and to spread positive word of mouth. Creating more welcoming environments for LGBTQ people isn’t just the right thing to do – It can also help historical sites be more representative of the communities they serve, and attract new life-long patrons.



The Institute for LGBTQ Health Equity is the education, research, and community engagement arm of Equitas Health, focusing on reducing health disparities in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community. We do this by developing and delivering exceptional LGBTQ culturally competent healthcare education and training, engaging with LGBTQ and HIV-positive patients, working with community based organizations, and supporting LGBTQ health research efforts in our region. If you are interested in more information regarding our available services, please visit www.equitashealthinstitute.com or contact us at equitasinstitute@equitashealth.com.